

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

1-272. (Canceled)

273. (Currently Amended) An on-line postage system comprising:  
a postage vendor system comprising:

an Internet interface for communication with a plurality of client  
systems;

a database comprising a plurality of encrypted user account records  
respectively associated with a plurality of registered users, said user  
account records each comprising a user private encryption key for  
digitally signing postal indicia data for postage purchased by a respective  
registered user, a user meter license number, and user balance  
information; and

a transaction server having a ~~United States Postal Service (USPS)~~  
~~compliant~~ cryptographic device coupled thereto, wherein said transaction  
server is configured to use said ~~USPS-compliant~~ cryptographic device to  
process a postage request received from a client system;

wherein processing said postage request comprises authenticating  
said postage request via said cryptographic device by exchanging a  
random number-based challenge-response with said client system, said

cryptographic device accessing in said database ~~[[a]]~~ an encrypted user account record associated with a registered user of said client system, and said cryptographic device updating said encrypted user account record; and

an administrator module in communication with said postage vendor system via said Internet interface, said administrator module comprising a statistical analysis report module configured to provide one or more administrator personnel with one or more reports about user transactions occurring at said postage vendor system, wherein said administrator module comprises software code executed by a processor.

274. (Previously Presented) The on-line postage system of claim 273, wherein said administrator module further comprises:

a user financial information module configured to facilitate reviewing and monitoring of said user balance information by said administrator personnel via said Internet interface.

275. (Previously Presented) The on-line postage system of claim 273: wherein said postage vendor system further comprises a license database; and

wherein said administrator module further comprises a license database access module configured to facilitate access to said license database and review of, for each of said plurality of registered users, the status of a license issued by a postal service authority.

276. (Previously Presented) The on-line postage system of claim 273, wherein said administrator module comprises a system access security module configured to secure communication between said postage vendor system and said administrator module.

277. (Previously Presented) The on-line postage system of claim 273, wherein said administrator module comprises an Internet access module configured to facilitate communication between said administrator module and said postage vendor system.

278. (Currently Amended) The on-line postage system of claim 273, wherein said postage vendor system further comprises:

a user account interface module configured to provide a user at a client system with on-line access to said user balance information and a user account statement from a respective user account record in said database, wherein said user account interface module comprises processor-executed software code.

279. (Currently Amended) The on-line postage system of claim 273, wherein said processing of said postage request further comprises generating said postal indicia data based on information in said postage request and said user account record.

280. (Currently Amended) An on-line postage vendor system comprising:

an Internet interface for communication with a plurality of client systems;  
a database comprising a plurality of encrypted user account records respectively associated with a plurality of registered users, said encrypted user account records each comprising a user private encryption key for digitally signing postal indicia data of postage purchased by a respective registered user, a user meter license number, and user balance information; and

a transaction server having a ~~United States Postal Service (USPS)~~ compliant cryptographic device coupled thereto, wherein said transaction server is configured to use said ~~USPS-compliant~~ cryptographic device to process a postage request received from a client system;

wherein processing said postage request comprises authenticating said request via said cryptographic device by exchanging a random number-based challenge-response with said client system, said cryptographic device accessing

in said database [[a]] an encrypted user account record associated with a registered user of said client system, and said cryptographic device updating said encrypted user account record;

a postal service interface module for interfacing with said postal service system; and

a user activity monitoring module interfacing with said postal service interface module and said database, said user activity monitoring module providing one or more postal service personnel using said one or more postal service systems with real-time access to user activity and accounting data in said postage vendor system;

wherein said postal interface module and said user activity monitoring module each comprise processor-executed software code.

281. (Currently Amended) The on-line postage vendor system of claim 280, further comprising:

a statistical reports module interfacing with said postal service interface module, said statistical reports module configured to provide reports associated with usage of said on-line postage vendor system by said plurality of users, wherein said statistical reports module comprises processor-executed software code.

282. (Currently Amended) The on-line postage vendor system of claim 280, further comprising:

a data update interface module interfacing with said postal service interface module, said data update interface module facilitating updating of postage rate information on said postage vendor system by said postal service system, wherein said data update interface module comprises processor-executed software code.

283. (Currently Amended) The on-line postage vendor system of claim 280, further comprising:

a data update interface module interfacing with said postal service interface module, said data update interface module facilitating updating of zip code information on said postage vendor system by said postal service system, wherein said data update interface module comprises processor-executed software code.

284. (Currently Amended) The on-line postage vendor system of claim 280, further comprising a financial interfaces module configured to facilitate a transaction between said postage vendor system and a financial system having a postal service account, said transaction comprising information associated with a transfer of funds from a user account to said postal service account, wherein said financial interfaces module comprises processor-executed software code.

285. (Currently Amended) The on-line postage vendor system of claim 280, wherein said processing of said postage request further comprises generating ~~postage~~ said postal indicia data from information in said postage request and said user account record.

286. (Currently Amended) A method for providing an on-line postage system comprising:

in a postage vendor system, providing an Internet interface through which one or more postage requests from a plurality of client systems may be received;

said postage vendor system maintaining in a database a plurality of encrypted user account records respectively associated with a plurality of registered users, said encrypted user account records each comprising a user private encryption key for digitally signing postal indicia data of postage purchased by a respective registered user, a user meter license number, and user balance information;

authenticating in a cryptographic device a postage request received from a respective client system, said authenticating comprising a random number-based challenge-response exchanged between said respective client system and said postage vendor system;

at said postage vendor system, using a ~~United States Postal Service (USPS)~~ ~~compliant~~ said cryptographic device to process said postage request, wherein processing said postage request comprises said cryptographic device accessing in said database ~~[[a]]~~ an encrypted user account record associated with a registered user of said client system, and updating said user account record; and



an administrator module communicating with said postage vendor system via said Internet interface to provide one or more administrator personnel of said postage vendor system with on-line access to information in said database, wherein said administrator module comprises software code executed by a processor.

287. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 286, wherein processing said postage request further comprises generating ~~postage~~ said postal indicia data based on information in said postage request and said user account record.

288. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 286, further comprising:

said administrator module generating a report comprising information about one or more user transactions occurring at said postage vendor system, wherein said one or more user transactions comprise said one or more postage requests.

289. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 286, further comprising:

said administrator module providing on-line reviewing and monitoring capability to said administrator personnel with respect to said user balance information in said database.

290. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 286, further comprising:

said administrator module providing on-line reviewing capability to said administrator personnel with respect to one or more licenses issued to said plurality of registered users by a postal service authority.

291. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 286, further comprising:

providing secure communication between said postage vendor system and said administrator module.

292. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 286, wherein processing said postage request comprises:

receiving a user request from a client system for a user account statement;  
generating said user account statement from said user account record; and  
providing said user account statement to said client system.

293. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 286, further comprising:

said postage vendor system providing one or more reports associated with usage of said on-line postage system by said plurality of users, said reports accessible by a postal service system through said Internet interface; and

providing, via said Internet interface, one or more postal service personnel with real-time access to user activity and accounting information in said postage vendor system.

294. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 293, further comprising:

said postal service system updating postage rate information on said postage vendor system.

295. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 293, further comprising:

said postal service system updating zip code information on said postage vendor system.

296. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 286, further comprising:

providing, via said Internet interface, a postal service system with an interface to a user activity monitoring module on said postage vendor system, wherein said user activity monitoring module comprises processor-executed software code.

297. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 296, further comprising:

providing said postal service system with an interface to an archiving module on said postage vendor system, wherein said archiving module comprises processor-executed software code.

298. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 296, further comprising:

providing said postal service system with an interface to a report generating module on said postage vendor system, said report generating module configured to provide reports of transactions in said postage vendor system, wherein said report generating module comprises processor-executed software code.

299. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 296, further comprising said postage vendor system exchanging information with a financial system having a postal service account, said information associated with a transfer of funds from a user account to said postal service account.

300. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 296, further comprising:

managing and restricting access to said postage vendor system by said postal service system.